



In Iowa's Interest:

How My Office Can Help You

by Senator Tom Harkin

When Cliff, a veteran from the Vietnam War, sought assistance from my office, his claim had been pending with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for more than three years. He was suffering from cancer, yet the VA had not approved him for service-connected disability benefits from exposure to Agent Orange. Due to his declining health, my office asked the VA to expedite his claim. Cliff received a significant back-payment and was approved for monthly benefits as well.

Debbie contacted my office because her son Jason was experiencing difficulty getting on the Section 8 housing assistance program waiting list in Des Moines. Jason lives with a disability and unfortunately applied for the wrong housing program during the application period. The housing authority told Debbie that Jason must wait until the next year to get on the list. My office inquired with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) – the agency that provides the funds for the Section 8 program – and asked them to consider Jason for their waiting list. HUD contacted the housing authority, which determined it would be reasonable to add Jason to the waiting list because, due to his disability, he may have been confused about the application packet he picked up.

For nearly 200 years, members of the Senate have been assisting constituents like Cliff and Debbie when they need help dealing with the federal government. I believe this is one of my most important duties as your Senator. During my time serving Iowa in the Senate, my office has worked to resolve more than 90,000 cases for Iowans. The importance of this role cannot be overstated.

If you are seeking information from the federal government and have not been able to find an answer, my staff may be able to help. Members of my staff can answer common questions that arise when fellow Iowans apply for benefits or seek services from our government.

Keep in mind, a U.S. Senator and staff cannot force a federal government agency to decide an issue in one's favor or overturn a decision that is within the law and final. In both the examples above, the outcome was favorable not because my office intervened, but because these Iowans were due the benefits and services they sought. My office helped facilitate the processes involved in these cases and thankfully a favorable outcome was reached. It is also important to note that a U.S. Senator cannot intervene in a matter before the courts, or any decision made by a judge. If you are experiencing legal difficulty, consulting with an attorney is the best way to assure that your interests are well-represented.

In most cases, my office will need a signed privacy release form from anyone seeking assistance with a federal agency. Once the appropriate caseworker on my staff has been engaged and this privacy statement is signed, my office can begin to work on your case.

For more information, or to access a privacy release form online, visit my website at harkin.senate.gov.